



Article 12: Proposed regulation of single-use plastic water bottles FAQ's Arlington Town Meeting 2022

Sponsored by Zero Waste Arlington (ZWA)

What would Article 12 do?

Article 12 would prohibit the sale of plastic bottles of non-carbonated, non-flavored water in sizes of 1 liter or less. It would apply to any business in Arlington that sells bottled water and ban the sale of bottled water in Town owned buildings, effective as of November 1, 2022.

What is the rationale for this bylaw?

The purpose of this bylaw is to protect the environment and public health, reduce litter, and reduce the Town's carbon footprint and climate change impacts by reducing the sale and disposal of single-use plastic water bottles.

Water is a healthy beverage. Wouldn't a ban on bottled water encourage people to buy unhealthy, sugary beverages like soda?

This bylaw targets the unhealthy, polluting, single-use plastic container, not the water. Tap water is the best alternative to bottled water. Our tap water is among the best tasting and highest quality in the country,¹ and is a low-cost, local resource that doesn't require wasteful shipping to reach our homes, businesses, and parks. We want to encourage the consumption of Arlington's tap water—with reusable water bottles, at restaurants, and at water refill stations, which are already present in most public schools and an increasing number of Town buildings. Additionally, carbonated and flavored water are exempt from this bylaw. A customer looking for a non-sugar option could still purchase seltzer water, for example.

Why aren't you going after all plastic bottles such as those for soda or energy drinks?

All single-use plastic bottles are part of the plastics pollution crisis. But we're choosing to focus on bottled water because it has a free, local, and readily available substitute—tap water! We hope that when consumers become aware of the numerous problems associated with single-use plastic beverage bottles, they adopt new habits such as carrying a reusable water bottle and move away from single-use plastic for *all* beverages.

How many single-use water bottles are sold by Arlington businesses?

ZWA has reached out to several small retailers that sell bottled water, including pizza shops, convenience stores, and fitness centers. Our research indicates that bottled water is sold by around 10 convenience stores and 25 takeout restaurants in Arlington. Typical sales are 100-200 12oz bottles per month, adjusted seasonally. One business reported selling 1,500 12oz bottles per month. In comparison, the largest retailers in

¹ Massachusetts Water Resources Authority, www.mwra.com/04water/html/wat.htm; <https://www.mwra.com/annual/waterreport/2020results/metro/arlington.pdf>

Arlington—Walgreens, CVS, Whole Foods, Stop & Shop—are estimated to sell a combined 500,000 12oz bottles of water per year by the case.

Losing any amount of revenue is an understandable concern for the small businesses we've spoken to, and ZWA is looking for ways to support them in this transition. However, the scale of the global environmental crisis we are facing demands urgent action. Regulating single-use bottled water is one small step Arlington can take to help mitigate climate change and plastic pollution. Retail bottled water bans began in 2012 in Concord. Since then, 20 other communities in MA have passed such retail bans. Consumers and businesses in these communities have adapted, and we believe Arlington can as well.

Additionally, we believe that a customer who goes into a store looking for a beverage and not finding bottled water is likely to purchase an alternative if one is provided to them. And carbonated and flavored water (as well as other beverages) are exempt from this bylaw, so retailers can still sell these products.

Couldn't we just take steps to encourage more recycling?

Recycling gives a false sense of assurance that it can eliminate the environmental impacts of bottled water. The ultimate disposal of plastic beverage containers represents just a fraction of their overall environmental cost, from resource extraction to production to transport for sale. A life cycle analysis of bottled water found that recycling reduced greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by about 20% (as opposed to not recycling). Alternatively, tap water in a reusable bottle resulted in an 80-90% reduction in GHG emissions and other environmental impacts.²

Plastic is also very difficult to recycle. Recycling rates are low to begin with, and every time plastic is recycled its quality deteriorates. Either new plastic is added to extend its life, or the recycled plastic is disposed of—either incinerated or landfilled—after a couple of recycling rounds.³ Billions of plastic bottles are manufactured from new materials each year to meet the demand.

Recycling a plastic bottle is better than putting it in a landfill or burning it in an incinerator, but we can't recycle our way out of the global plastic pollution crisis. We need to greatly reduce our production of single-use plastics.

Further questions? See the [ZWA website](#) or contact zerowastearlington@gmail.com.

² Madalyn Cioci et al, Product Bans and Restrictions: A guide for local government policymakers (2016), <https://www.pca.state.mn.us/sites/default/files/p-p2s1-06.pdf>.

³ Christos Symeonides et al, *Buy-now-pay-later: Hazards to human and planetary health from plastics production, use and waste*, Journal of Paediatrics and Child Health (2021), <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1111/jpc.15777?fbclid=IwAR0XREH559CpJtz4J5IzFA7Jctv5rLdavRMJ41aoa7hhBFGo5LPOgz9FHM>